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THE GROWTH OF NATIONALISM IN THE BRITISH EMPIRE

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THE GROWTH OF NATIONALISM IN THE BRITISH EMPIRE¹

A CANADIAN who speaks to a company of Americans on problems of the British Empire usually feels under certain obligations to explain himself. It is not easy for Americans to understand why Canada remains linked with Great Britain. Canada is the only considerable state in America to retain a political tie with Europe. Since there was a time when all America was an appendage of Europe, it looks as if Canada is only a little belated and as if she has not yet found her political destiny. Every Canadian is aware of a certain condescension on the part of his American friends, the counterpart of what Mr. Lowell felt that foreigners showed to Americans. Occasionally one hears a suggestion that Great Britain should send Canada to the United States. In a legal case in New York the other day Canada was described as "a colony or dependency of Great Britain".

A friend of mine, who held high office in the United States, used to offer me well-meant consolation as to the outlook for Canada. "The Constitution of the United States", he would say, "is almost a perfect instrument. You will be happy under it. Your obvious destiny is to join us. We do not wish to hasten the process. But our arms are open and we shall embrace you warmly when you come." What could be more alluring? I was so cruel as to say to him that Canada was reasonably happy in her existing relations, that the federal constitution of Canada has merits, even when put side by side with that of the United States, that the Canadians are a perfectly free people, with their destiny entirely in their own hands, and that they are helping to work out a political experiment as momentous for mankind as is the notable experiment in liberty which is being made by the United States. It is true that there are anomalies and apparent contradictions in the position of Canada. Her business at Washington is done, not through her own ambassador, but through the ambassador of Great Britain. Canada has no power to declare war and is technically at war whenever Great Britain is at war. But theories and their applications represent very different things. Canada takes just as much share in the wars of the British Empire as she chooses to take. In truth, too, the British ambas-

¹ This paper was read by the author at the meeting of the American Historical Association in Washington, December 31, 1915.

sador at Washington represents the views of Ottawa as really as he represents the views of London. May I ask my American friends to learn to think of Canada as a nation, not a colony, and not to waste any pity upon her, for she is a free partner in a gigantic political movement of which I now speak.

My topic is the Growth of Nationalism in the British Empire and I am confronted at the outset with the fact that, as far as the self-governing states of the British Commonwealth are concerned, there is really no such thing as a British Empire. An empire, one would suppose, is a state which has a central controlling government. But although the British Parliament is, in a strictly legal sense, supreme over all British dominions, there is no central government for the whole British Empire. No one body can tax the British Empire. Canada and Australia and New Zealand and South Africa are not governed from London, nor have they any common government. Each of these states governs itself exactly as it likes. As long ago as in 1858 when Canada imposed a high tariff on British goods and the government at London protested, there was no uncertain sound about the reply of Canada. It asserted "the right of the Canadian Legislature to adjust the taxation of the people in the way they deem best, even if it should unfortunately happen to meet the disapproval of the Imperial Ministry". It is not easy to describe as an "Empire" the state in which the different parts are so completely self-governing. "The British Commonwealths" would be a more descriptive name and I will ask my hearers to remember that I use the words "British Empire" with practically this signification. The part of the Empire of which I am speaking is in truth a group of free commonwealths.

The most interesting growth in the British Empire during the nineteenth century was that in the self-government and individuality of the various British peoples. Whatever we may mean by nationalism, there was certainly very little of it in the British Empire a hundred years ago. The American Revolution removed from the Empire the only element over-seas that could make any claim to self-government. After that tragic cleavage between the English-speaking races, almost no people of British origin were left outside the home land. In Canada, even including the Loyalist refugees from the revolted colonies, there were less than one hundred thousand. The same is true of the West Indies, relatively more important then than now. In India there were not half this number. And this was the whole tale of British people over-seas. Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, as we know them, did not then exist. There is little

wonder that the successful revolutionists of the United States should feel a fine scorn of the Britons in Canada who would not join them. These seemed to be misguided supporters of a lost cause. A tyrannous mother-land had forfeited all right to the allegiance of her sons over-seas, and successful revolution called the Canadians craven, since they did not join in the fight for liberty.

It was, indeed, in the half-century after the Revolution that there was a real and united British Empire, for every part of it was governed from London. It is true that never after her loss in America did Britain attempt to tax her colonies. They were to her a costly burden. What we now know as the Dominion of Canada consisted of four or five detached provinces, each insignificant, each really ruled by a governor sent out from England, each backward and almost stagnant. Little thought as yet had any of the colonies that they were new nations, with the same rights of self-government which Britons at home possessed. Yet was there a something working in these communities which had promise for the future. Each of them had its own legislature; each had the storm and tumult of elections, in which there were free speech and free voting. The elected members, however, did not control the executive government; that was the affair of the governor and of the Colonial Office in London, which appointed him.

With the growth of population came changes. By 1830 there was a clamorous demand in Upper and Lower Canada for complete control by the people of their own local affairs. The controversy was violent. In 1837 and 1838 it led to armed rebellion by the radical element which asked for full political rights. Though the rebellion was put down, the cause apparently lost was really won. A dozen years later, that is by the middle of the century, every British community in North America had secured control of its own affairs. The movement spread to other continents. Australia followed quickly. Canada was the older British dominion and naturally led the way, but the British colonial system as a whole was changed, and by the mid-century its self-governing states in all parts of the world were really freer than had been the former English colonies in America.

This very change, however, brought a danger to the British system. Why should the mother-land take any trouble to preserve a tie with communities which brought her little advantage? They erected hostile tariffs against her goods, they were a charge upon her revenues, they were perennially relying upon her army and fleet for defense. Canada was frequently involved in disputes with the

United States. In 1837-1838 there were frontier incidents which might well have caused war. A few years later there was the question of the boundary line in Maine. Then came that of the western boundary with the insistent demand of American pioneers in the West of "Fifty-four forty or fight", which meant that all south of this degree of latitude should go to the United States on penalty of war. There is perhaps not much wonder that British statesmen should have thought a self-governing over-seas empire not worth having. Gladstone told Goldwin Smith that the cession of Canada to the United States would not be an impossible compensation to the North if the South should break away. Beaconsfield, Gladstone's great rival, hoped at one time that the troublesome colonies would become independent. When this was done Britain would be left with no European peoples over-seas but only with races of alien blood and faith whom she could really rule.

Then, just when these depressing views were most current, a strange thing happened. The half-torpid colonies in North America suddenly revealed a new life and a new wisdom. They shook off their narrow isolation and formed a great federation. Fear had much to do with it. The United States, recently torn by civil war, was likely to become a great military nation, a menace to the British communities on its northern border. Because of this and of impotence and deadlock in their own political affairs the British colonies united to form one great state. By 1871, the union of once scattered colonies extended from the Atlantic to the Pacific. In this movement, if men could have read it aright, was the birth of a new conception of the British commonwealths. But this meaning was not seen at once. The old idea of the subordination of the colonies to the mother-land still survived for a long time. The movement for separation was, however, quickly checked. It was one thing for British statesmen to look on blandly while a few scattered colonies broke away; but quite another thing to let a country like Canada go with four million people. After all, trade tended to follow the flag and thus, even on lower commercial grounds, it would be a bad thing to end the colonial relation. There were other reasons, too, and one of them, most potent of all, was that, even though Great Britain might be willing to let go of Canada, Canada had no wish to let go of Britain.

Here we come upon one of the unexpected things in this strange British Empire. The old assumption was that when the new states were strong enough to stand alone they would wish to do so and would break away from the mother-country. But this represented

only the coldly intellectual view of politics. In fact, political loyalties have as much to do with the heart as with the head. It never occurred to the average Canadian, even when his country reached national stature, that he could not remain both a Canadian and a Briton. The British flag had always been his. Why should he change? True, he was a Canadian first, for Canada was the country he knew. Britain he had probably never seen, and he understood but little of a state of society in which there was an aristocracy, a House of Lords, and an established church. Still he saw no reason why he should break with the old home of his race and no movement for separation would come from him.

There was, too, a strong political drift against change. Union was in the air at the time the federation of Canada was created. This event followed immediately upon the reunion of the United States after the Civil War. The North-German Confederation was formed in the very year in which the British North America Act, creating the Dominion of Canada, passed the British Parliament. Four years later Italy was finally united. In the next year, 1871, came the creation of the German Empire. This was followed quickly by an eager ambition among European states to secure colonies. Trade rivalries were keen, markets were needed, and markets under the same flag seemed to be more secure than markets under an alien flag. It thus happened that the ungracious permission offered to the colonies about 1860 that they might go when they liked, and the sooner the better, had become by 1890, thirty years later, the rather nervous fear that they might take themselves off and leave Great Britain to a lonely sovereignty over a dependent empire ten times more populous than herself.

During all this time the movement was growing for union within the Empire on the lines of the Canadian union. In 1900 the six Australian states united to form a great commonwealth. Most wonderful of all, less than ten years later, the four colonies of war-worn South Africa formed a great Union more centralized and consolidated than any of the other unions in the British Empire. In no case, however, was union effected with the view of breaking away from the Empire. Rather was the design to draw closer together. Yet each union represented a distinct type and was brought about in conformity with local conditions. Here then is the paradox which is characteristic of the British commonwealths. The more they become separate in type the more they hold together.

I have not forgotten that my topic is the growth of nationalism in the British Empire and I ask myself whether nationalism both

makes the self-governing states of the Empire different from each other and also holds them together. For the moment I shall not try to define nationalism. There is no doubt that one environment tends to differentiate a whole people from those in another environment. The Canadian is different from the Australian and both are different from the Englishman. The differences are physical and they are also mental. The man who has seen the society about him created in his own generation will have a view of social relations different from that of a man born into a highly organized society, with ancient buildings, traditions, and gradations of rank. It is easier for an Englishman than it is for a Canadian to show deference and respect. The Canadian, in turn, is a citizen of a lesser state and is humbled commercially by contact with a great neighbor much more highly organized than himself. The Australian, supreme in his lonely continent in the Southern Sea, has no old local traditions and no neighbors. He creates his own standards and believes in himself. When shown Westminster Abbey he may murmur, "Ah, but you ought to see the Presbyterian Church at Ballarat!" He is subtly different from the other types. The difference is not racial, for the race is the same. It is the difference caused by conditions and it will increase with time. You will not flatter the Australian by calling him an Englishman. He wishes to be known as what he is, an Australian. In this respect his nationalism is complete.

This, however, is not the whole story. This man, so thoroughly himself in his southern home, is passionately a Briton and one in feeling with all other Britons. This has always become apparent in any crisis, and especially in that of war. If anyone still had doubts, the amazing unity shown in the present war furnishes the answer. The thoughtful Australian or the Canadian will deny that he owes any loyalty to the British Isles. He feels this no more than the Englishman feels loyalty to Canada. Each of them is satisfied to be loyal to himself and they hold together because, on great national issues, they have the same outlook. I am a little puzzled when I try to explain why this unity exists. No doubt it is largely the result of education, of habitually surveying questions from a certain point of view. Probably its deepest cause lies in unbroken tradition. Each of us is set in the midst of a system in which many forces are uniting to shape our conception of life. British political liberty has had a slow growth. The religious outlook, the education, the social relations, the tastes and habits of to-day come to us from a long past. In some such way as this is the note struck that

we call British. All the scattered British commonwealths share it, and though there are different types, widely scattered, they have the unity of a family.

This unity is not racial. Racial unity is necessarily limited to those whom birth has made members of the race. Thus it cannot become comprehensive and cosmopolitan. A racial nationalism involves either isolation, or the supremacy of a dominant race in a mixed state. It tends to run to pride and arrogance, to thoughts like those of the Hebrew that his race is the chosen of God. When the British Empire was younger we used to hear a good deal about the triumphant destiny of the Anglo-Saxon race. But, of late years, this note has rarely been heard and instead we hear something at once more tangible and more vital. At one time we seemed to seek uniformity partly, perhaps, because we assumed unity of race. It was held that political wisdom required in Canada and in Australia an exact copy of Britain. Canada was to have a House of Lords and an established church. Experience, the truest of all teachers, dispelled this dream, and, in time, not likeness but diversity of institutions was emphasized and little thought was given to race. We know now and we are proud that no one part of the British Empire can be quite like any other part. When we ask why, the answer is that this is the fruit of Liberty. Nature herself is infinitely varied and, when men are free, when they adjust themselves to the varieties of Nature, they evolve differences. To-day no wise statesman has any thought of trying to anglicize the British Empire.

The wonder-worker is thus not race but Liberty. Let us dismiss forever the superstition that there is any magic in race to hold people together and effect political unity. In the present war the most determined and irreconcilable opponents are two great states of the same Teutonic race. It is partnership in common liberties which unites people. Ireland oppressed was the obstinate foe of England; Ireland free stands by her side in a great struggle. Here then is the reconciler and the unifier in the life of nations. We dismiss the phantom of race and put in its place, as the basis of political organization, the solid reality of education as that on which the best life of the nations must be established—education in judgment, responsibility, and self-control. The growth of the new nationalism in the British Empire is just the growth of liberty.

At the present time the British Empire represents almost exactly one-fourth both of the population and of the area of the world. The population of the world is about 1,720,000,000, of which Britain has about 433,000,000; the area is 51,230,000 square miles, of which

Britain has about 13,000,000. The British Empire is nearly evenly divided between the northern and the southern hemispheres. Two-thirds of it are in the East and only one-third is in the West. The chief seat of power is in the West but nearly six-sevenths of the people of the British Empire are not Europeans. The proportion of people of European origin is likely to grow since they hold for occupation nearly two-thirds of the whole area of the British Empire, with vast unoccupied spaces still to be peopled. It is a vital characteristic of the Empire that it constitutes a link between the East and the West. It is less a creation than a growth, a growth out of conditions and necessities into a system unprecedented in the history of the world. It has become a microcosm of the world itself. It includes people of every race and of every creed. No other state has ever held such vast areas in every continent—almost half of North America, nearly the half of Africa, nearly the whole of Australasia, and a great part of Asia. In Europe alone is the territory of the Empire comparatively small in magnitude. There are in it more than three times as many Hindus and nearly twice as many Moslems as there are Christians.

Shall this Empire break up or shall it hold together? Is it a sacred duty to preserve it? In this connection let me ask my American hearers a question. If the republic, in the slow growth of years, had founded kindred republics in every continent, had fostered and protected them, had dreamed dreams about what this union of free peoples would do for mankind, would you willingly let this union end in disruption? To-day British citizenship is the most wonderful in all the world for it makes the Briton at home in every continent. Suppose that an American, sailing eastward, found himself in another United States in Europe under the Stars and Stripes. Suppose that he went on by sea and found himself in South Africa and still in the United States under his own flag. Suppose that he sailed on and found himself in India with more than three hundred millions of people still under the Stars and Stripes. Suppose that he went on to the great continent of Australia and found still his flag, on to New Zealand, on still across the Pacific to America, where he has his home, a half continent still under the Stars and Stripes. In every one of these states he has been a citizen, needing no change of allegiance in order to vote. Is there not something in such a picture to stir the blood? Is it thinkable that such a union should perish? And this is the British Empire.

The growth of nationalism does not mean the break-up but the strengthening of this Empire, for Liberty unites and Nationalism is

just the expression of Liberty. It is true that an occasional traveller will tell you that he has been in the Canadian West or in Australia or in South Africa and that he has found the people there not English at all, critical indeed of the English, and resolved to go their own way. No doubt this is all exactly true and the truth causes not dismay but rejoicing to the discerning Briton. For, let it be said again with emphasis, the Empire is not an English Empire and the English are only one of many peoples in it. The union of the British Empire is best assured by building up various centres of strength, one, if you will, in each continent, rejoicing in its independence and perfect freedom. No state, really free, is going to cut itself off from the supporting brotherhood of other free states. Modern politics have taught no lesson more clearly than this, that the safety and dignity of nations is to be found, not in standing alone, but in standing together; and the nations within the British Empire are not blind. Each of them does as it likes. Even for this great war the finances of the Empire have not been pooled. Great Britain may be spending \$200 a year for each head of its population while Canada may be spending only \$40. Of every eight of its people Great Britain is enlisting one while in Canada the proportion may remain only one in twenty-five. Australia has a different ratio. South Africa follows another plan and India still another. No Parliament controls them all. In the impossible event of a dispute as to authority between the Canadian and the British Parliament the Canadians would flout the British Parliament and obey their own. If Canada was told that she *must* remain within the British Empire she would probably assert her liberty and go out. It is a free union and if compulsion began union would end.

The union will not end. The long growth of liberty has brought forth something stable. Deep in the souls of the British peoples there are common aspirations and resolves. Though the South African War might have taught us otherwise, two years ago many only hoped that this was true. Two years ago it was common to hear a discussion of the extent to which Canada would take part in wars in which Britain might become involved. When the real shock came it was found that no one cared for a nicely balanced measure of more or less. It became clear that unconsciously the British peoples had pledged their all to each other and that the family of nations was resolved to stand or fall together. Since then many a blood-stained battlefield has been witness to the stern gravity of this pledge. War has blown away mists of disunion. It has shown a reality in the spiritual unity of the British peoples which makes it a great force of nature.

My discussion has had to do only with the self-governing commonwealths of the Empire. Of the dependent Empire, the peoples who have not yet grown to the stature of self-government, I say only this, that the expansion of their liberties will help, not hurt, the union of British commonwealths. The practical British spirit distrusts the enthusiasm of the doctrinaire. The exercise of liberty requires education and not all peoples are yet fit to be self-governing. In political development, Asia is more backward than Europe. Already, however, India has the beginnings of representative institutions. The best aim of man upon the earth must surely be to live a free, varied, and fruitful existence. Nothing is farther from the minds of those who are pondering the future than that the present dependent Empire shall be always dependent. They do not believe that the East must remain subordinate to the West. The British Empire links East and West and the West hopes to pass on to the East its own education in freedom and thus to bridge the chasm between the two sections of mankind. The Empire is a great school of political life and even in the lowest classes of the school there should be some training in self-government. No uniformity is aimed at but rather the free expression of individualism. However slow the movement may be, it is yet true that India has learned richer liberties during the last hundred years of its existence than it acquired during all the long centuries before the time of British rule.

I should not wish my note of optimism to give the impression that all difficulties have been solved, all liberties won. Defects still mark the British system and the chief of them is that, in respect to matters in which the British commonwealths must stand together, there is no organ to express their will. In domestic affairs the commonwealths may have the widest differences. Canada is for protection, Great Britain is for free trade. Canada puts restrictions upon immigration from certain countries, Great Britain keeps her doors wide open. Thoughtful students of the life of the commonwealths agree that differences in tariffs, differences in the franchise, differences in social outlook, may grow even more marked without any breach of unity. But to other nations on the question of war or peace the Empire must speak with one voice and its complexity of interests, each to be considered, must always ensure many voices urging peace. It is precisely on these affairs that the people of all the states of the Empire have in the past had least to say, so that all alike have left their fate in the hands of a few leaders. But this cannot continue. In the future the people of Great Britain will insist on a more popular control of foreign affairs. It will also soon

be as impossible for the United Kingdom to conduct the foreign affairs of Canada as it would be to conduct those of the United States. The question will have a practical solution at the close of the present war. Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa have all made conquests during the war and will have an important voice in the final decisions respecting these conquests. It is still true, however, that on the eventful fourth of August, 1914, the issues of war and peace were decided not by any pronouncement of the British commonwealths but by the Parliament of the United Kingdom alone. It is equally true, of course, that if the other parliaments had not approved of the declaration of war they need have taken no decisive action to support it. But it is desirable that all the self-governing peoples of the Empire should have a voice on so grave an issue and a change of method is therefore necessary.

During recent years these questions have been under consideration by the very able group of men who conduct the quarterly known as the *Round Table*. It has never happened that a political question has had given to it more patient and serious thought than is now brought to bear on the relations of the British commonwealths. They stand together for security and not for trade advantages. A common tariff is not thought possible. Canada and Great Britain, for instance, are in different stages of commercial development and must be left free to impose what duties they like against both each other and the outside world. The prevailing opinion in the younger commonwealths supports giving to Great Britain a preference (in Canada it amounts to one-third of the duty) for her manufactures. It is held by some that a high tariff in Canada even against British goods will aid British trade if a higher tariff is charged against the outside world. Experience shows that protected countries are heavy importers and that a preference would ensure great markets within the Empire to British trade. But trade is secondary to the need of unity for security. Security, however, is not the whole story. There is an even deeper and a finer motive, a motive based on the duty of peoples more advanced to give support to those, as yet, less favored, and in doing so to purify themselves.

No final policy can yet be proclaimed but I can best show the growth of nationalism in the British Empire by stating what is seriously proposed. Two things must be counted vital:

1. The self-government and the equality of the separate commonwealths are alike necessary. If any obstacles exist which keep Canada and Australia from being as completely self-governing as the United Kingdom, such obstacles must be removed and equality

of status must be made unquestionable. It is to be noted that opinion in the United Kingdom is as insistent upon this point as opinion in Canada and Australia.

2. This equality must carry with it a complete sharing of responsibilities. At present the Parliament of the United Kingdom is different from the Parliament of Canada in that it has jurisdiction not only over the British Isles but also over the whole Empire. It is proposed that the Parliament of the United Kingdom shall become such strictly, with authority confined to the United Kingdom, and that a real Imperial Parliament shall be created to be composed of the representatives of the whole self-governing Empire. This Parliament would be limited to three functions.

(a) It would conduct the foreign affairs of the whole Empire and decide the issues of war and peace.

(b) It would, as a corollary of this function, control and direct the armed forces of the Empire.

(c) It would govern the dependent Empire, now governed solely by the United Kingdom.

To discharge its functions this Parliament would have the power to levy taxes for national defense. The rate need not necessarily be uniform for all parts of the Empire but would be the subject of negotiation and agreement. The existing parliaments might collect the taxes agreed upon. The Empire would be a unit in respect to its defense.

I am stating what is proposed and do not necessarily endorse it all. My own mind, indeed, is still open on the main issues. There are grave difficulties in regard both to taxation and to the parts of the Empire not yet self-governing. This, however, is the point to which the growth of nationalism has come—that the commonwealths of the Empire are to be precisely equal nations, sharing responsibility for the Empire as a whole. Canada is to have world responsibilities as broad as those of Great Britain. One-quarter of the people and of the land of this planet is to constitute a great state of many nations, secure and strong. East and West, North and South, the old peoples and the new peoples, are to hold together and each part is to be encouraged to mature its own liberty on its own lines.

The British Empire has learned something from its misfortunes. While the building process was going on, not much thought was given to the deeper meaning of the whole. Such an interpretation needs profound study and an almost inspired insight. It is not safe to take the writings of even a generation ago as in any way adequate

to the thought of to-day. The Empire was not, as it has been foolishly expressed, created in a fit of absent-mindedness, but rather was created by a people too intent upon action to realize the full meaning of what they were doing. To-day it stands a complex fabric. It is American as well as European, of the East as well as of the West. There is to be an eternal rejuvenescence of the old by contact and co-operation with the young, a steadying of the young by the maturer wisdom and culture of the old. This Empire, itself the product of no far-seeing design but only a natural growth, has no aim further to enlarge its borders. It is already vast beyond precedent and to develop its own resources, cure its own defects, and enlarge the happiness of its members will furnish to it tasks for all the centuries to come. Its best spirits aim at no racial supremacy. They believe in the stability which comes through liberty. Cynics will say that only dreamers can hope in such a plan. But this promise for the future is, in truth, less wonderful than what has already been achieved in bringing so many lands under a single sovereignty. At any rate the British Empire has some vital import for mankind as a whole. It is not to be spoken of in any note of exultation in its power or greatness but rather in terms of its responsibilities and duties.

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